



PORTSMOUTH, Va. (Oct. 23, 2018) Lt. Cmdr. Nicole Kelm waits for her next physical therapy patient at Naval Medical Center Portsmouth, Virginia, where she works as a physical therapist, recalled to active duty status.

Kelm volunteered all the way from Lomé, Togo, West Africa, where she is a Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist for the U.S. Peace Corps. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Stephane Belcher/Released)

I AM NAVY MEDICINE: LT. CMDR. NICOLE KELM

A drive to serve others led me to the physical therapy (PT) field and Navy Medicine. Physical therapists assess musculoskeletal disorders and injuries and recommend treatments to restore mobility and function. I originally focused on work with the Department of Veterans Affairs following PT school, but learning about the direct accession program ultimately led me to active duty service. The chance to serve with complex cases, outside of 9-5 hours, in a variety of settings, and around the world all hugely appealed to me.

My first assignment, then-Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune, provided more than an opportunity to work with young and active patients. My duties immediately placed me into a leadership position with a steep learning curve and served as a crash course for working in the military culture. I then transferred to U.S. Naval Hospital Sigonella and worked with a broader base that included active military members, their dependents, and contractors.

After transitioning to the Navy Reserve last year, I remain ready to jump in wherever the mission demands. My service as a volunteer training unit (VTU) reserve member also differs from my select reserve colleagues who conduct paid drills one weekend per month and two weeks per year. I receive

orders from VTU Europe and administrative support from Navy Operational Support Center Jacksonville, but I can step in to backfill an active duty PT or respond to other contingencies anywhere in the world.

While I stand ready to assist anywhere, the VTU construct also provides me with flexibility that allows me to stay engaged in the reserves while living overseas. I recently completed an assignment as the monitoring and evaluation specialist for Peace Corps Togo in West Africa, where I used data collection and analysis skills to judge program performance. I will soon move to the Republic of Congo, where I will continue to learn new skills and continue to work in a foreign language – all talents that I bring to bear for the Navy.

Navy Medicine has never failed to be a rewarding and exciting experience. I have helped patients, improved as a clinician, grown as a leader, and helped others to do the same. It has been a tremendous opportunity to serve.